

Carbon Footprint Analysis



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The carbon footprint indicates the overall amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with a product, along its supply-chain and sometimes including from use and end-of-life recovery and disposal.

There are three main types: organisational carbon footprint, value chain carbon footprint, and product carbon footprint. Wackernagel and Rees (1996) define an "ecological footprint" as an accounting tool used to measure the resource consumption and waste assimilation requirements of a defined human population or economy in terms of a corresponding productive land area. The term "carbon footprint" originated from the ecological footprint concept but in recent years has evolved into a concept in its own right.

Applicability?

The carbon footprint method allows SMEs to identify where the key carbon hot spots are within their product's life cycle. Subsequently, it helps SMEs to develop low-carbon products and services and to choose green business options. In that way the carbon footprint method allows SMEs to differentiate their products based on measured environmental characteristics. Process of tool application There are many available sources of data, software tools, consulting services, handbooks, and technical guidance on life cycle assessment and the climate change impacts from goods and services, either for a fee or free of charge. The LCA Resources Directory for identifying such sources (in Europe and beyond) is available at <http://lca.jrc.ec.europa.eu/lcainfohub/> [3]. Suitable background data sources for the footprint are those available in existing LCA databases. These databases contain the life cycle profiles of the goods and services, as well as of many of the underlying materials, energy sources, transport and other services.

Benefits

The carbon footprint method provides better information about environmental performance of products, which can also be used for marketing purposes. A benefit could be the avoidance of direct or indirect costs of CO₂ emissions (e.g. through an emissions trading system).

Examples

Carbon footprints have been calculated for a large number of products and services, including: Cement, paper, plastic, glass, cans, computers, carpet, tires, lumber and other building materials, paved roads, mailing letters and packages, foods, shirts, detergents and many more.

References - European Commission, JRC (2007): Carbon Footprint – what it is and how to measure it, Ispra. <http://lct.jrc.ec.europa.eu/pdf-directory/Carbon-footprint.pdf> [4] - European Commission, JRC (2009): Making sustainable consumption and production a reality – A guide for business and policy makers to Life Cycle Thinking and Assessment, Luxembourg. - Growcom, A. (2008): What is a Carbon Footprint? An overview of definitions and methodologies, Horticulture Australia Ltd, Sydney. http://www.daff.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/59025/Hort-Fruit-... [5] - Wackernagel, Mathis & Rees, William (1996)"Our Ecological Footprint" (New Society Press)

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